



Raising a Cavity-Free Child

According to the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, your baby's bottle could lead to serious problems for your baby's teeth.

Bottles of milk, juice or soda given to young children as nighttime or naptime pacifiers are a leading cause of nursing bottle caries, which can have lasting dental consequences. If your child must have a bottle at naptime or bedtime, it should only contain water. By age 14 months, your child should be off the bottle and drinking from a cup.

To help children grow up to have healthy smiles, here are some helpful hints for parents:

- **Begin cleaning your baby's mouth with a soft moist washcloth, gauze or infant toothbrush and water** the first week the child is brought home from the hospital. Although most babies don't have any teeth until about six months of age, a daily cleaning in infancy will get your child used to the process.
- **By starting early, your baby is more likely to accept you cleaning his teeth later** when it is necessary to prevent tooth decay. Once the first tooth appears, brush baby's teeth twice a day using a small smear of fluoride toothpaste on a soft-bristle baby toothbrush. For children between the ages of 2 to 6, use a pea-size amount of toothpaste.
- **Your child's first visit to the dentist should be by age 1 or when the first tooth comes in.** Although baby teeth will eventually fall out, they are *very important* to your child's dental development. The dentist can make sure your child's dental development is proceeding normally as early as his first birthday. Your pediatric dentist will advise you when and how often your child should have checkups.
- **Stop your child's thumb sucking habits before his permanent teeth come in or by age 4.** Sucking on a thumb or pacifier is a natural and satisfying behavior for babies. However, the habit can alter the position of your child's developing teeth and the dental arches if it continues after his permanent teeth begin to come in. If you are having trouble getting your child to stop sucking his thumb, your pediatric dentist may be able to offer some advice.
- **Ask your dentist about applying sealants** to protect the chewing surfaces of the molars. Sealants are generally applied when the six-year molars come in. Sealants can be effective in preventing cavities on the chewing surfaces of molars, the most cavity-prone area of the mouth.

For more information, call the Guilford County Department of Public Health at 336-641-7777 or visit www.myguilford.com